

# Vital piece of economic recovery being ignored

By A.J. "Pete" Reixach | Posted: Wednesday, October 5, 2011 2:00 am

There is much debate happening in Washington over how best to put Americans back to work and boost our economy. However, as policymakers confront the need for both fiscal austerity and job creation for the millions of Americans who are out of work, including the 9.1 percent of unemployed residents right here in Brazoria County, seaports — one of our country's oldest and largest economic drivers — have been ignored.

What our government may not fully realize is that seaports are essential to international trade and keeping our economy strong. For centuries, they have served as a vital economic lifeline by bringing goods and services to people around the world. In fact, U.S. seaports handle more than \$5.5 billion worth of goods each day — that's 99 percent of our country's overseas cargo.

But despite their critical role in our economy, the federal government has allocated only 2 percent of its total discretionary spending budget for 2012 for transportation. What's more, existing transportation programs do not adequately address the critical movement of goods.

If we're serious about ensuring our country's long-term prosperity, policymakers need to increase investment in America's seaports. By supporting seaport infrastructure, we can create high-paying, sustainable jobs that will help put the citizens of Brazoria County back to work.

In fact, in 2010, U.S. exports supported an estimated 9.2 million jobs — including more than 11,000 jobs right here at Port Freeport. That means for every \$1 billion of exported goods, more than 5,000 jobs across the country were supported.

Failure to improve our seaport-related infrastructure will hinder our country's global competitiveness. Seaports need to regularly maintain their landside connections and perform maintenance dredging to ensure that we can continue to handle almost all of our country's overseas cargo.

Furthermore, if seaports cannot dredge deeper channels to accommodate larger ships, we will not be able to support the increased number of goods Americans have come to rely on each and every day. Our nation's success depends on increased infrastructure investment. It's that simple.

Port Freeport recognizes our important role in the national economy, and regardless of an economic downturn, we have invested millions in new docks and facilities. But there's much more to be done, and we can't do it alone.

Our country cannot afford to let the federal government continue to overlook seaports. They are too essential to our global competitiveness and economic prosperity. Increased funding for U.S. seaports is a long-term investment that will support Brazoria County and the nation at-large for generations to come.

*A.J. "Pete" Reixach is executive port director/CEO of Port Freeport.*